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Duncan, Albert Greene

President's address

[Waltham? Mass.]

1916

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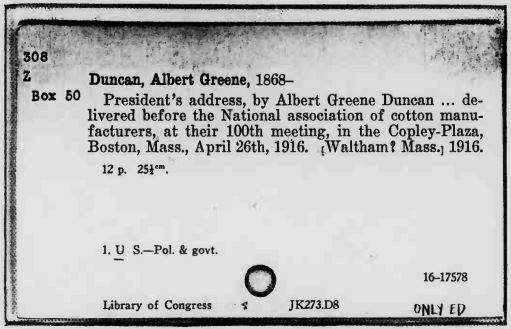

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Duncan, Albert Greene, 1868–

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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

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ALBERT GREENE DUNCAN, PRESIDENT,

Treasurer Harmony Mills,

77 FRANKLIN STREET, - BOSTON, MASS.

Delivered Before The National Association of Cotton Manufacturers, at their 100th Meeting, in the Copley-Plaza, Boston, Mass. April 26th, 1916.

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Dec. 29, 1917 AET

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

ALBERT GREENE DUNCAN, President, The National Association of Cotton Manufacturers, 77 Franklin Street, Boston, Mass.

At the time of our meeting two years ago,— in April, 1914,— no one would have ventured to predict that a catastrophe was overhanging the world. Humanitarian, economic and financial considerations would then have been advanced, showing that a world war was impossible. The outbreak in the Balkans seemingly settled, the nations of Europe, after a period of strain and tension, had resumed their normal course of life.

A few short months followed, and prosperous and happy Belgium was a scene of desolation and slaughter. France, startled from her thrifty pursuit of industry and commerce, became a prey to terror and almost disaster. Russia's vast population and most stupendous national resources formed no defence from an invader who drove her back from her borders amid the ruin and destruction of her fairest provinces. England, supposedly secure in her isolation, seeing her dominance of the seas and her colonial empire threatened, was forced to take a leading part in a contest she could not avert.

Lack of adequate preparation for emergencies, far from keeping these nations out of a struggle into which many of them were loath to enter, made early results most disastrous. As a sequence of this world war, we have seen the blasting of Servia and Montenegro, the murder of hundreds of thousands of Armenians, and the blotting out of Galicia and East Prussia, with terrific sufferings to civilian populations who had no part or in many cases no knowledge of the struggle.

How foolish, in view of these awful events, is the self-sufficient attitude of America. The early days of the war threatened the breaking down of our financial structure. Curtailment of our trade followed, caused by the withdrawal of foreign vessels whose place our insignificant merchant marine could not supply. We suffered a personal loss, as well as in our dignity as a nation, by the murder of our fellow-citizens on the Lusitania. As the grip ot the warring nations upon each other has become more tenacious, we are feeling the restrictions of our shipments to neutral nations, and our utter inability to secure many raw materials and products needed by our manufacturers. Yet at this day, nearly two years after the outbreak of the war, we are still discussing academically the question of the possibility of our being involved, the extent of our needed preparedness, or even the necessity of any preparation at all.

To anyone who will calmly view the history of the past two years, the plain lesson is evident, that civilization is but a thin veneer over the inherent savagery of mankind; that neutral rights or the rights of civilians have but little weight when national policies are at stake, whether these policies be for aggrandizement or self-preservation. To the citizens of this country, it should be clear that a nation that intends to preserve its national life and national ideals inviolate must make adequate preparation for its own defence against any emergency, no matter how unexpected, or against any attack, no matter how unjust and at variance with every policy it has hitherto professed.

This lesson is particularly pertinent to America at the present time, for both our business and foreign policies inevitably tend to make us enemies rather than friends among the nations of the world. Our foreign commerce is openly seeking to capture neutral markets from those who formerly held them and are prevented from trade owing to exigencies of war. Our necessary policy of neutrality is bound to be misunderstood, and to antagonize both parties in the struggle. Further than all, by our prosperity, in that we seem to profit from the misfortunes of

other nations, we invite the envy, the cupidity and the hatred of all.

This is not the time to discuss in detail the question of preparedness. In principle it would seem as if all Americans should agree upon the necessity of national defence, but, complicated as this policy is by questions affecting the various parts of our country in a different way, it seems desirable to avoid the details of preparedness and discuss the fundamental ideas which must lie behind any national policy, whether of defence or of any other problem affecting our national life.

A strong national spirit, inspired by a love of country and animated by the ideals that have made our country what it is, must develop a broad outlook with which national problems must be faced. Vaporings of patriotism, jingo enthusiasm, pointing to our vast national resources and the willingness of millions of Americans to spring to their country's defence, calling attention in loud tones to our ability in the past to respond admirably to every national need, will not suffice. A calm, sober realization of what our country means to us is needed. A decision as to the lengths we are individually prepared to go, in deed as well as in word, is demanded if we would make our country the greatest, the readiest, and the sanest country, amid the warlike extravagances dominating the rest of the world.

What does America stand for? We believe it unique among the nations of the earth. It was founded on liberty, dedicated to the rights of man, and pledged to the principles of humanity. Read the Preamble to our Constitution, the Farewell Address of Washington, and the Gettysburg Speech of Lincoln,—three great documents that embody our national ideal. What has America done to justify these expressions, and in what degree has accomplishment squared to the hopes of our founders?

We were the first nation in the world to develop universal education as a training for manhood suffrage. Coincident with the settlement of our vast area came the planting of the school and the college for the training of our citizens. We have, in general, abandoned all question of property qualifications and have

based the right of citizenship only on allegiance to our country and an understanding of the principles of our government.

We have ever held to the doctrine of the greatest good to the greatest number consistent with the rights of all, and in spite of demagogues' vaporings on special privilege, one who follows the tendencies of legislation in this country must see as its underlying motive the uplifting and improvement of the average man. We have built new communities of self-governing citizens, trusting to them the regulation of their local affairs with the only limitation that their laws and court decisions should conform to the Constitution of our common country. We have done this while opening our doors to the immigration of the world, and have not feared the issue.

We have not selfishly held our territory to ourselves, but trusted to the ideals of the republic to mold the newcomers of every race and nation into real American citizens. In spite of all that has been said in the last few months against the attitude of certain hyphenated Americans, we have but to point to whole communities which, in recent times, as periods run in the life of a nation, have been settled largely by races and peoples entirely alien to our own, but who, by the influence of the common school and the inspiration which a free national life has given, have become as loyal Americans as any who can trace descent from the founders of our country.

By the blood and suffering of the great Civil War, the question of our nation being an indivisible union, rather than a loose confederacy of states, was settled forever, and our welding together as citizens of a common nation marked the beginning of the era of greatest prosperity to all sections in development of resources and growth of population.

As a united nation, we undertook, for humanity's sake alone, the rescuing of Cuba from plunder and spoliation, without any thought of material benefit or territorial aggrandizement, and when, in the course of our struggle with Spain, the Philippine Islands were thrown as helpless wards upon our hands, we extended to them, and to the islands of the Pacific, our ideals of

education, self-government and liberty, and from us these peoples have experienced the only real peace and security they have ever known.

America is founded upon ideals and has lived because of them. It stands for something more than the material prosperity of its citizens. Its success as a nation is measured by something else than the yield of its factories, its mines, and its acres, or the per capita wealth of its inhabitants. Its national ideal cannot be expressed by columns of figures. America stands for something higher than cotton or iron or international trade. The people of this country achieved liberty before they acquired wealth, they established justice and the rule of law, because they believed these to be the foundation of good government, and not mere expressions of expediency.

As citizens of the first and the greatest republic in the world, we do not realize our unique position. We do not fully appreciate that citizenship carries with it a higher degree of personal responsibility in a republic than in any nation under any other form of government. The success or failure of a republic depends upon the individual citizen, for with an ever-changing personnel in government no continuity of policy is possible unless demanded by the electorate.

The chief peril of democracy is its unadaptability for unified thought, and far less for unified action. The public often think they see the truth and act from sincere conviction, but many times without knowledge or understanding of fundamental facts. It is therefore essential that the ideals of our republic be kept alive by every citizen as a rallying-point for national unity and action, for it is only by the inspiration of a national ideal that the divergent forces in a republic can be focussed for the common good.

As the panorama of the world's history passes before our eyes, we see that it has not been wealth, nor commerce, nor learning, nor military power, nor any of the other attributes which could be particularly applied to any of the great nations of the earth, past or present, that has kept them strong. Trade

routes and material advantages may have helped these nations at their origin, but the reason for their continued predominance and success has been their adherence to a strong and worthy national ideal, and when this has gone, decay and disintegration have followed with rapid strides.

A republic having no trappings of sovereignty must hold high principle alone as the rallying-point for a strong national spirit. We are not an empire or a kingdom, and cannot draw from an hereditary monarchy inspiration that really flows from national spirit. The constitutional monarchy of England, whose citizens are as free as our own, have in the person of their king the embodiment of their national ideal and of their history, which leads the mind of each citizen back even to medieval times, and in giving allegiance to the office of kingship, not to the person alone who fills the throne, their thoughts unconsciously crystallize on all that their nation has stood for during the centuries of its history. The citizens of Russia in revering their Czar, do not regard him as a personality, but as the "Little Father" of his people, and the embodiment not only of their national existence but as the head of their organized religious belief. Germany, not a nation before 1870, welded by the personality of a Bismarck which unified many discordant states of differing race and religion, has become a fatherland to a people who see in the empire the embodiment of the national ideal. France, though a republic, is the successor to an empire and a kingdom, and has drawn into her present form of government much of the inspiration and unifying force with which she followed the imperial eagles over Europe.

No better example of this national spirit can be given than by an incident at the close of the Franco-Prussian War, when France saw herself with a large part of her territory held by an invader, her Emperor a captive, her capital in the hands of the Commune, and her whole system of government broken. Marshal Bazaine, the commander of the fortress of Metz, surrendered without adequate resistance, and on the restoration of a

stable government was court-martialed to answer to the manner in which he had fulfilled his trust. He pleaded that a large part of the army had been routed and captured, that there was no settled form of government to whom he could appeal for instructions, and he therefore felt that any resistance was unnecessary. As he said, "There was nothing left." The answer of the presiding judge will live in history as an example of how a national ideal can triumph over any catastrophe, however severe. Addressing the accused commander, he said, "But was there not France?" His question was never answered.

A republic whose citizens lose the conception of the nation as an entity and the embodiment of the high ideals and principles for which it stands, will soon sink to a point where expediency will replace national honor. Expediency excites no inspiration and is not a principle on which a nation can live. Expediency dictates the theories of peace at any price. Expediency demands commercial instead of spiritual welfare, and may well cause the breakingup of the very foundations of government itself.

The ideal of a government founded on principle is absolutely at variance to the theory that a state exists solely for the individual, and that the individual has a claim on his state for the protection of his life and property that is not equally balanced by his duty to do his part to keep his nation true to the high principles which were the cause for its foundation, and are the reason for its continued existence. The theory that a government exists merely as an insurer of real estate titles and a protector of material wealth is unutterably opposed to any ideal of nationalism, for such protection could exist with equal security in a vassal state ruled by an alien nation who had no interest but to encourage the tax-paying ability of its inhabitants.

I feel that, in the last few years, we have failed lamentably in this country to put a strong national feeling as the fundamental basis of our policy of government. Too often have sectional and local considerations been given weight as opposed to a

national conception. There has been too much legislation for selfish ends, and too little national legislation for national needs. Our legislators, who are not alone to blame, as they but represent the sentiment of their constituents, have too often devoted their time and attention to the securing of appropriations for local benefits, to legislation to promote the advantage of one section as opposed to another, rather than to adopting a broad, constructive and national policy which should regard all questions in the light of national concern, and not in the sole interest of any one section of our country or of our population.

While of necessity our citizens, owing to different local environments, naturally must approach almost any national question from a different point of view, and while there must exist in any free form of government political parties with different ideas of how the nation's affairs should be best administered, he is no true American, whether he be citizen or legislator, who puts personal, sectional or party advantage above national welfare and prosperity.

No better illustration can be given of the failure of our citizens or their legislators to regard our nation's welfare as a whole, than the action of our Congress in the last few months. With wars and rumors of wars all around us, with the realization that, after the present struggle, the world will never be same again, that new alliances will be formed and old ones broken, that the warring nations will of necessity be forced to change their internal economies and their external policies in order to recoup themselves for the enormous expenditures in which they have been involved, — with these facts patent to everyone, there has been no definite, consistent policy to put this country in an adequate state of defence for what may happen at any time, or in a condition of industrial preparedness for the trade war bound to ensue at the close of the struggle. These great questions have been considered purely in the light of local self-interest and party advantage, and not in relation to national welfare.

The war has already shown that, in spite of ample natural resources of our own to supply practically every requirement of

our industries, we are dependent on foreign nations for a large number of essential products, notably dyestuffs. Yet, in spite of a clear case being made out by our citizens, irrespective of party, our legislators have let petty politics intervene, rather than regard the needs of their country first and their party afterwards.

With the necessity of large expenditures for preparedness admitted, no definite financial policy of taxation has been advanced, but an eager search has been made for some new form of revenue which will be least antagonistic to the individual voter, with the intent to minimize the opposition of taxpayers by imposing upon the few the largest part of the burden. In any program of such national import, taxation should be borne equally, according to his means, by every citizen, as a part of the responsibility of his citizenship. This clashing of political and personal interest with the interests of the nation as a whole is what is making the administration of our government inefficient and insecure for its citizens.

The man who thanked God that a naval gun had not yet been invented which would shoot from the Atlantic seaboard to the Mississippi river was certainly not thinking along national lines, nor was the leader of the dominant party in Congress regarding all sections of the country with equal solicitude and showing a national spirit in tariff legislation when he said, "We in the South intend to make the New England mills come down and put their mills there or else go out of business." Such sentiments emphasize the fact that citizens of this country often regard sectionalism, individualism and partisanship above nationalism. Such sentiments are at the root of much of the legislation of which business men in the last few years have had reason to complain. We should go back to first principles. We should forget our individual, local and partisan prejudices, and turn our faces towards the ideal of nationalism, which has been our salvation in our government crisis of the past.

We are in the midst of a crisis today, and possibly one of the most far-reaching in its effect upon our national life we

have ever faced. In spite of our momentary prosperity, in spite of our isolation from the struggle which is raging over three-quarters of the rest of the globe, we cannot pursue a lofty policy of indifference and aloofness to the great questions of national and international import which press for settlement. We have been forced, in spite of ourselves, into international relations. To protect our own financial structure, we have recently been obliged, for the first time, to engage in international finance, and such chains of commerce, once forged with other nations, cannot easily be broken. We must realize that we can no longer consider our own country as a law unto itself, but with the dawn of peace must engage in the struggle of nations for world trade. We have formed closer bonds with the nations to the south of us, and the Monroe Doctrine has changed from a measure for our own defence into an added responsibility we cannot shirk.

We can never again avoid world politics, if we would, and in entering this broader field of national opportunity we must firmly hold the principles for which America has always stood; — of peace, "with charity towards all and malice towards none;" — of friendliness to all nations; — of insistence upon full protection of American rights; — of determination to defend American independence, American territory, and American ideals; — of the rights of humanity; — of the working out of the problems of democratic government in the Western Hemisphere without outside interference.

This is true Americanism in external relations, a creed to inspire and unite our citizens to the highest endeavor. But we cannot exhibit a national spirit in external relations unless we vitalize in internal affairs the doctrine of "Americans All," not sectionalists, not partisans, when the national needs of business, of defence, of revenue, or of any other problems of country-wide import demand settlement. For the Government means the whole people, with every citizen a sovereign whose allegiance can be given only to that which is higher than any embodiment of kingship:— A NATIONAL IDEAL.

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TITLE